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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0101
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000705

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TAGS: PGOV PINS PREL KPKO IV

SUBJECT: THREE KILLED BUT PRIME MINISTER SORO UNHURT AFTER RPG ATTACK ON HIS AIRCRAFT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Vicente Valle for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Multiple sources confirm Prime Minister and New Forces leader Guillaume Soro is alive and well after an RPG attack on an airplane in which he was traveling at Bouake airport on the morning of June 29. ONUCI Acting SRSG Abu Moussa told us that, according to UN Air Ops personnel who witnessed the incident, a rocket was fired from the vicinity of the Bouake airport at Soro's plane as it was landing and "at least three people" had been killed. Soro was unhurt and in a safe location in Bouake, according to Moussa, who said he had spoken to the Prime Minister a few minutes earlier.

¶2. (C) According to DATT sources, three RPGs were fired at the plane and there were an unspecified number of wounded in addition to the three dead. These sources added that there was only the one incident against Soro's plane (which belonged to President Gbagbo) and that there had been no subsequent fighting. We received several reports that shooting had continued in Bouake but this may have been the reaction of security forces to the original attack.

¶3. (C) According to the ONUCI political chief, Licorne, ONUCI, and FANCI have all taken appropriate security measures in Abidjan. (We have detected nothing unusual in troop movements or dispositions other than increased security measures around the hotel Ivoire related to a wedding there of a member of the President's family.) ONUCI and FANCI have also reportedly gone on alert at the Abidjan airport. Abidjan remains calm.

¶4. (C) We also spoke with New Forces spokesperson Alain Lobognon, who was in Bouake. Lobognon confirmed Soro was fine and under UN protection in a safe place. (DATT was subsequently told Soro is at his home in Bouake.) He added that the situation in Bouake was a bit chaotic but OK.

¶5. (C) A French Embassy official, citing Licorne eyewitness accounts in Bouake, told us that rockets and AK-47 fire had been directed at the plane as it was landing but that the rockets had not exploded, thereby averting a bigger tragedy. He said the three dead were Soro's protocol director, chief of security, and an assistant chief of staff. He added that there had been some shooting in Bouake shortly after the incident but that the city was calm. The French Embassy has advised its citizens in Bouake to exercise caution. According to several sources, shops in Bouake are closed.

¶6. (C) The Chief of Staff of Minister of Tourism and New Forces stalwart Sidiki Konate gave us a very different account of what had happened in Bouake. According to him, the attack occurred while Soro and his entourage (which included Konate) were on their way to town from the airport and was carried out by some 15 soldiers using light weapons.

However, since this report contradicts those of all our other sources, we do not find it credible.

¶7. (C) Comment: Things appear to be quieting down again although tensions will remain higher than before. Speculation has already started as to who may have been behind the attack. At this point, it's just that, speculation, but the likeliest candidates would seem to be disgruntled New Forces elements. At any rate, Soro and the peace process appear to have dodged a bullet (or rocket).

HOOKS